Harvest

Harvest is an ancient tradition with some aspects predating Christianity.

What Is Harvest?

Harvest is the time of year when **crops** are gathered on a farm. The crops are sorted and packed up to then be transported for selling. Hundreds of years ago, when harvest time arrived, everybody in a village would be expected to help gather the food in order to earn their share of the crop for the oncoming winter months. With huge technological advances, we no longer need to be involved with the harvest. Instead, we tend to buy our food in shops or online.

When Is Harvest?

The word harvest comes from the Old English word 'hærfest' (pronounced 'h-eer-fest') meaning autumn so harvest time in the United Kingdom usually begins in late August or early September. Historically, the first harvests were celebrated on 1st August in an ancient festival called Lammas, meaning 'loaf mass'. However, traditionally, it is the end of the harvesting season that has always been most commonly observed.

The end of the harvest period used to depend on when the final crops were gathered. Now, the Harvest Festival signifies the conclusion of the harvest and the beginning of the festivities, always occurring on the Sunday nearest to the Harvest Moon (the full Moon closest to the autumn **equinox**). The religious tradition called Saint Michael's Mass (which is also known as Michaelmas and honours Saint Michael the Archangel) marked the close of the merrymaking on 29th September.





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Harvest

There are many fascinating and wonderful harvest traditions. Here are just a few:

How Is Harvest Celebrated?

When the final batch of crops arrived at the village, the Harvest Supper would take place. Also known as the Harvest Home, this bountiful banquet of meats, fruits, vegetables, puddings and bread was shared by the whole community. Farm owners would eat, sing and dance alongside labourers from the fields.

In modern-day UK, Harvest Festival is celebrated mostly by schools and churches and is often used as a way to teach how food gets from the farms to our plates. Harvest Festival services in church usually involve specific songs, prayers and readings that give thanks for the harvest. In some schools, children are sometimes asked to bring tins or packets of food from home. The food can then be collected and delivered to those in the local area who are deemed to be the most in need of it, such as the elderly.

What Harvest Traditions Are There in the UK?

John Barleycorn

A name mentioned often in traditional harvest folk songs, John Barleycorn is a personification of the life cycle of the crop. His story is told through song and involves him beginning as a child, growing strong and tall as a man and finally becoming old and weak until he is cut down so that others may live on.

Anglo-Saxon farmers believed that the spirit of the crop was within the last sheaf of corn to be harvested. From this legend, it became tradition to create a 'doll' with the final sheaves left in the field. Thought to be a descendant of Ceres, the Roman goddess of grain, the spirit of the corn inhabited the doll and was given great importance at the harvest festivities.

Hollaing Largesse

Farm workers in the fields of East Anglia would form a circle and shout 'Holla Lar! Holla Lar! Holla Lar-Jess!' if a stranger happened to walk past. The stranger was then expected to donate money to help pay for the labourers' supper that evening!

Glossary

crops: A plant that is grown in large quantities, especially as food.

equinox: One of the two times in the year (usually in March and September) when the Sun is above the equator and day and night are of equal length.

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Questions

1. Which activity was **not** part of the Harvest Supper celebrations? Tick one.

   - ○ singing
   - ○ eating
   - ○ sports
   - ○ dancing

2. Draw **four** lines and match each fact with the sub-heading where it can be found.

What Harvest Traditions Are There in the UK?	The whole village worked together.
When Is Harvest?	Some schools collect food to share with those in need.
What Is Harvest?	A stranger would pay for supper if called by workers harvesting in the fields.
How Is Harvest Celebrated?	Michaelmas honours Saint Michael the Archangel.

3. Look at the section called **How Is Harvest Celebrated?**
   Find and copy one word which means 'in large quantities'.

   _____

4. Fill in the missing words.

   Anglo-Saxon farmers believed that the _____ of the crop was within the last sheaf of corn to be _____.

5. List **two** figures honoured during the harvest festivities.

   - _____
   - _____

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6. Explain how the sharing of food to those who need it is relevant to harvest time.

7. Look at the section called **What Harvest Traditions Are There in the UK?** Why do you think that harvest time has so many traditions? Explain your answer.

8. Compare the ways in which harvest was celebrated in the past and how it is celebrated now. Why do you think that there are differences?

9. Look at the section called **When Is Harvest?**
   Summarise the information in 25 words or fewer.

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